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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001606

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE, NEA/I

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: MILITARY CHIEF VISITS LARGEST KURDISH CITY

REF: ANKARA 1057

Classified By: DCM Douglas Silliman, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (U) GEN Ilker Basbug, in his first domestic trip as the new chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS), traveled to 2nd Army Headquarters (primary responsibility of which is to prosecute the war against the PKK) in Malatya, and Diyarbakir, Turkey's largest Kurdish city. During his visit to 2nd Army Headquarters, Basbug said the 2nd Army is critical, especially because of its role in confronting separatist terrorism and in conducting internal security operations.

¶2. (U) In Diyarbakir, Basbug told reporters, "We love Diyarbakir and all people of Diyarbakir. This is the message we want to convey." Basbug met for an hour and a half with 19 local business representatives and asked for their recommendations on how to confront the PKK terrorist threat. Basbug was accompanied by the Land, Naval, Air Force, and Gendarme Commanders, the commanders of the 2nd Army and the 7th Corps, as well as Diyarbakir Governor Avni Mutlu. Basbug told the press that he held the meeting to emphasize the importance he attaches to civil society in the struggle against terrorism, and to ask for its support. Diyarbakir Chamber of Trade and Industry head Mehmet Kaya, who attended the meeting, said this is the first time a TGS chief has met with civil society representatives in Diyarbakir. According to Kaya, Basbug stressed at the meeting that the fight against terrorism is not just a military task, and that extensive "social mobilization" was needed in order to succeed.

¶3. (C) Diyarbakir-based NGO contacts who did not attend the meeting were skeptical of Basbug's visit and viewed it as a public relations effort. Nurcan Baysal (protect), head of a NGO receiving USG funding, said, "These visits have become a tradition recently." She said Turkish civilian or military authorities visit the southeast and meet with business leaders who do not represent the majority of the population. Basbug, she claimed, was asking business organizations how to prevent young people from joining the PKK, which shows that he sees the challenge as primarily an economic issue. "In this sense, what he said is not important; he is just echoing his predecessors." Lezgin Yalcin (protect), the head of an umbrella NGO organization working to coordinate the efforts of regional NGOs, agreed: "There is nothing new in what Basbug said. We expect both the GOT and the Turkish military to take concrete action instead of giving remarks."

¶4. (C) Comment: By going to the South East on his first trip as TGS chief, Basbug underscored that his top priority

continues to be defeating the PKK. As Land Force Commander, Basbug expressed his support in June for starting Kurdish language broadcasts on a state-owned television channel (reftel). His willingness to seek out the views of business representatives in Diyarbakir is a hopeful indication that Basbug may support other non-military measures designed to drain support away from the PKK. Coordination with civilian authorities and implementation of policies that respond to Kurdish concerns will remain a challenge.

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